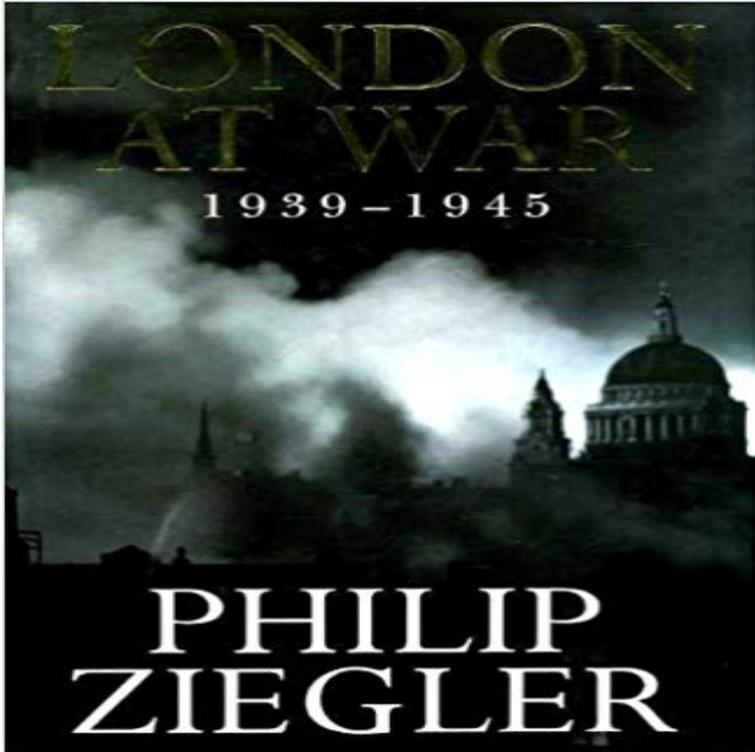


London At War



In 1939, London was not merely the greatest city in the world; it was the most tempting and vulnerable target for aerial attack. For six years it was in the front line of the free world's battle. It endured the horrors of the blitz of 1940 and 1941, and the terrifying new bombs - the V2s, the V2s. Other cities suffered more intensely; no other city was so consistently under attack for so long a time. This is the story of Londoners at war - for Philip Ziegler, best known as a biographer, is above all fascinated by the people who found their lives so suddenly and violently transformed: the querulous yet strangely gallant housewife from West Hampstead; the turbulent, left-wing, retired schoolmaster from Walthamstow, always standing up to the authorities; the odiously snobbish woman from Kensington, sneering at the scum who took shelter in the Underground; the typist from Fulham; the plumber from Woolwich. It was their war every bit as much as it was Churchill's or the Kings, and this is their story. Through a wealth of interviews and unpublished letters and diaries, as well as books and newspapers, the author has built up a dazzling portrait of an entire population under siege. There were cowards, there were criminals, there were incompetents, but what emerges from these pages is above all a record - in story after story - of astonishing patience, dignity, courage and humour. I hope, Ziegler writes, we will never have to endure again what they went through between 1939 and 1945. I hope, if we did, that we would conduct ourselves as well.

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